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A smart card that is compatible with multiple different protocols includes a standard set of contacts that comply with the protocols of a published standard, and another contact not designated by the standard which is used to indicate whether the card is to operate in a non-standard mode. When the card is to operate in the non-standard mode, a simple start-up procedure is employed which does not require strict timing constraints, enabling a less expensive interface device to be used. The interface device can be connected to any bus of a computer which operates in accordance with a desired non-standard protocol. Due to the flexibility and functionality offered by smart cards that have microprocessors incorporated therein, the multi-protocol smart card can be used to drive, or otherwise communicate with, any of a variety of peripheral devices, whether or not a personal computer is present in the system.